MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT!

<http://tigerbeatdown.com/2011/10/10/my-feminism-will-be-intersectional-or-it-will-be-bullshit/>

<http://tigerbeatdown.com/team-tiger-beatdown/flavia-dzodan/>

Now picture this: me screaming the above. Angry. VERY ANGRY as a matter of fact. Screaming this at my computer screen. Screaming it at nobody and everybody. At you. You, person I might have never heard from who might have not even commented on this blog or any of the other publications where I can be regularly found scribbling my discombobulated ideas. Even though we never met before, I AM ACTUALLY, SCREAMING AT YOU RIGHT NOW. **MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT!**. And I am screaming this because I want to convince you, I want to get it through you that this is not a choice or an abstract concept or an intellectual exercise. I am not screaming because well, you know, I just discovered intersectionality and OMG SO COOL GUYS. YOU NEED TO READ THIS. No. My feminism NEEDS to be intersectional because as a South American, as a Latina, as someone who knows certain parts of the Global South intimately by virtue of being a Southerner, as an immigrant living in Europe, as a woman, I am in the middle of what I like to call the “*shit puff pastry*”. The shit puff pastry is every layer of fuck that goes on above me, below me, by my sides, all around me. And in this metaphorical puff pastry with multiple layers of excrement, I am the dulce de leche that is supposed to make it palatable so that someone else, more specifically the kyriarchy, can eat me.

And here’s the thing: while I am screaming at you, I am also asking, nay, DEMANDING that you scream with me. And I am asking that you become as angry as I have been this past week. Because without anger and without righteous indignation and without the deep, relentless demand for change, my feminism, YOUR feminism, everyone’s feminism will fail. It will be bullshit.

This past week I’ve been screaming this a lot. Because I like to play “*connecting the dots*” (s.e. smith ipse dixit) as a matter of political practice. I play “connecting the dots” even though sometimes I might not get a properly outlined landscape but the equivalent of what my 1 year old niece playing with a bunch of sharpies on the coffee table would produce. Which is to say, sometimes, the pictures I draw when I connect dots might not make sense or might be inaccurate or might have missed a few dots to be totally accurate. But I am willing to pay the price of not making sense sometimes if I do eventually get it right. I would rather sometimes come across as far fetched than miss the landscape that the shit puff pastry provides. And these past few days I’ve been playing connect the dots more often than usual. Hence my anger. Hence my disappointment with feminism. FEMINISM! I AM DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED IN YOU. To the point that I even considered ditching the label altogether. And if that happened, I would use a new label that pretty much sums up my politics: ***Flame-throwerism***. Wherein I set feminism on fire and with its ashes I fill my cats’ kitty litter box and let them pee on it. That’s how angry I’ve been at feminism this week. Kitty litter levels of outrage.

**Layer one of this week’s shit puff pastry**

My anger was inaugurated with [a simple photograph](http://www.racialicious.com/2011/10/05/which-women-are-what-now-slutwalk-nyc-and-failures-in-solidarity/). Just a yellow sign, written with what pretty much looks like a sharpie. And this sign states that “*woman is the N\* of the world*”. Held by a White Slut Walk participant in New York. I am sure by now you know the story. And I became a bit angry. Angry that someone would not realize what a hurtful, shitty thing that was. Angry that someone would not even know the history behind that word. That a woman, a fellow self identified young feminist would not have done some pretty basic homework. I was sad and angry. And then sad again and angry. Basic homework does not entail having read academic works dissecting the history of slavery, it’s legacy, colonialism and the idea that for centuries (and pretty much to this day) Black women have been considered unrapeable, that those N\* bodies were (and sometimes, painfully very often still are) considered non-human. No, I did not expect a nuanced knowledge of all this. Just basic human compassion skills. A minimum understanding of the meaning behind a word. Wikipedia levels of knowledge, which is, like the ABC of feminist activism. And when I saw that sign, I screamed “MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT” for the first time this week. I screamed at all of you, at everybody and nobody. (Incidentally, at this point, my youngest cat got a little bit scared with my screams but let out a meow of pleasure at the prospect of feminism making its way to her kitty litter box). And I can hear you now say “*But Flavia! Why do you care?! This one sign was in Slut Walk New York! In another continent altogether! What is that to you?!*”. It is that my politics are all about anti racism. Moreover, racism is probably the one thing I struggle with the most. In my feminism, in my political activism, in my writing, IN MY FUCKING DAILY LIFE. When I am met with snide remarks because of my accent, when people openly dismiss my political ideas in a debate because I mispronounced a Dutch word, when I am told about “those people” (my fellow Non Western immigrants), WHEN I AM PUNCHED IN THE FACE as I was once, while the drunk asshole throwing the punch called me “cunt alien”. My feminism HAS to be about racism by virtue of being a significant layer in my very own shit puff pastry.

**Layer two of this week’s shit puff pastry**

After this photo made the rounds in some online blogs and magazines, it ended up posted in Slut Walk New York’s very own Facebook page. And commentary ensued. And oh yes WHAT A COMMENTARY THAT WAS! WHAT A SIGHT TO BEHOLD! [This commentary, which Latoya Peterson has documented extensively](http://www.racialicious.com/2011/10/06/slutwalk-slurs-and-why-feminism-still-has-race-issues/) (bless her, the degree of patience and nuance she attempted to provide, along with several other WoC who tried to have their voices heard in that discussion made my heart sink). This commentary ranged from the usual “*But it’s just a word!*” to “*We live in different times now!*” and then the EPIC FAIL, the shameful, disgraceful remark: “*you are all jumping to side and rally against the black version of “n\*”; we are simply rallying against the human version of “n\*”*”, which, as [Eli\_Betta pointed out](http://www.racialicious.com/2011/10/06/slutwalk-slurs-and-why-feminism-still-has-race-issues/#comment-328124797), bears the painful question: “*Is the black “version” separate from the human “version”?*”. And I sat there reading this discussion. I refreshed it for hours. These people were supposed to be my fellow feminists. This, I’ve often been told, IS MY SISTERHOOD! These are my people! BECAUSE I AM A FEMINIST! And of course, I screamed again, so many times that, at this point, my throat started to hurt. I was unsure if it was hurting because of my screaming or because of the tears I was holding up. **MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT!** I screamed it every time I hit refresh and a new, unknown up to that point level of fail showed up on my screen. I was not just disappointed that my supposedly fellow feminists were capable of such vile. I was disappointed that the very same organizers would allow this commentary to go unchecked. That, in the name of some misguided version of the old “freedom of speech” trope, they would not intervene and end the carnage. That the people behind Slut Walk New York’s Facebook page would not jump in and delete those comments. BECAUSE YOU CANNOT CLAIM TO WANT TO PROVIDE SAFETY FOR WOMEN WHILE YOU ARE LETTING \*SOME\* WOMEN BE RACIALLY ATTACKED. BECAUSE IF YOU DO THAT, YOU ARE A FUCKING HYPOCRITE AND YOU SHOULD JUST GO AHEAD AND SAY IT “*WE WANT TO PROVIDE SAFETY JUST FOR \*SOME OF US\* WHILE THE REST, THE BROWN, BATTERED BODIES OF BLACK WOMEN ARE CALLED NAMES*”. Because that’s a more accurate description of what transpired. Can you tell that I am still screaming as I type this? Can you tell I am angry? And if you are not angry with me right now, then I do not want to be part of your feminism. Then I do not want any fucking sisterhood with you or whatever nonsense we can come up to excuse our movement’s failures. If you are not angry at this, like I am, then I know we are not part of the same team.

And then something else happened: the whole thread was deleted. Just like that. Because, well, PEOPLE WERE SAYING RACIST THINGS. What.The.Fuck. People had been saying racist things for hours, without one single page moderator intervening by curating the ensuing discussion. Without a single deletion and a warning for those commenters who had suggested that Black women were “*non human*”. Instead, they deleted the whole thing ([at Racialicious there is a good summary of significant portions of what is now gone](http://www.racialicious.com/2011/10/06/slutwalk-slurs-and-why-feminism-still-has-race-issues/), plus, for those who are on Tumblr, [many people have made screen captures of some salient commentary](http://curlyingenue.tumblr.com/post/11103505116)). However, that deletion is unforgivable. Because the mere action also erased the commentary from Black (and non Black, in fairness) people who vehemently opposed the apologists. The act of erasure also did away with the opposition. Now we are left with third party accounts and commentary but we can no longer gauge the full extent of the offense. And I am sorry, but that is fucking lazy and irresponsible. If you cannot keep a thread in check, if you cannot provide a safe space, then perhaps you have no right organizing supposedly safe spaces for others; spaces like, oh, I don’t know, *a massive march over New York City*. If, instead of owning up for what happened under your watch, you delete the whole thing, I want no part in your feminism. I am going to say this now, loud: I AM NOT PART OF YOUR FEMINISM. I hope I am clear on that.

**Layer three of this week’s shit puff pastry**

I am not supposed to be angry at any of the above. Or better said: if I am angry at any of the above, I should weep in silence and not tell anyone. Because if I say as much as one word, I am ruining Slut Walk for everybody. Or at least, [that’s what Shira Tenant told me in her piece at The Huffington Post](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shira-tarrant/ending-the-slutwars_b_996473.html) a couple of days ago:

The point is there is strength in numbers. We need as many as possible involved in preventing rape and sexual assault. Critical self-reflection is important to any political movement. But, at some point that self-critique becomes unproductive — or worse, it divides a movement from within.

In the spirit of loving critique, instead of writing about the shortcomings of SlutWalk, what if Keli Goff wrote an entire piece about the problem of rape? What if Wendy J. Murphy used her media reach to attack rape, not other feminists? Rather than reducing SlutWalk to an event that involves “stripping down to skivvies and calling ourselves sluts” — then quickly dismissing this as “passing for keen retort” — I’d like Rebecca Traister to consider the far deeper concerns about sexual assault that underscore these events. I’d like to request that Gail Dines stop perpetuating divisive misinformation about race and anti-rape protest.[…]

Today, we don’t need COINTELPRO to divide feminist groups. We’re doing it to ourselves.

**MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT!** Do you see where I am coming from with this? Am I not supposed to apply that lens to Slut Walk? Am I supposed to ignore the violence that ensued in the N\* word discussion? Am I supposed to overlook its blatant violence in the name of sisterhood?! IS THAT WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?! Then again, I want no part in such movement. The rotten, reactionary mandate that claims criticism as divisive and undesirable has no place in my politics. Whether they are called Feminism or Flame-Throwerism.

See? I never said anything about Slut Walk because it is a movement I do not necessarily feel as mine. And that is OK. Not every initiative has to include me to be valid and valuable. It is valuable to some people and that is fine for me. That was always my stance towards the movement. I have little interest in publicly reclaiming the word “Slut” because it is a word towards which I do not have an emotional connection. *Puta*, on the other hand, the Spanish language equivalent, is another story altogether. Because that’s the language of the man who beat me up while calling me “*puta*”. Because that’s the language of the world I grew up in and where women labeled as “*putas*” were also unrapeable and pretty much unworthy of being considered human. Because “*puta*”, is also the derogatory word used to refer to sex workers.*Putas*, a whole lot of women who deserved violence. But “slut” does not mean much to me, personally, so I always looked at Slut Walk from afar. When it happened in Amsterdam, I did not go. But I did believe it was OK for other women, for those who did feel like reclaiming the word to do so. My politics do not need to be identical to everyone else’s. We can differ in strategies or modes of action without those differences becoming gaps that cannot be filled. After all, the strategies might differ but our end goals are the same.

But after the debacle with the racial discussions, I no longer feel the same way. Now I need to publicly stand against Slut Walk. However, I am told, I am a bad, bad feminist for doing so. *I am divisive*. I am now part of the problem. However, any movement, be it feminism or something else that demands that I ditch my overall intersectional lens is not a movement I consider worthy of my allegiance. It is a movement that is actively against me. It is a movement that tells the xenophobic man who punched me in the face that well, that is somewhat acceptable because we do not actively stand against racism. Moreover, in our supposedly safe spaces, racism is openly allowed. And if people complain about it, we will delete the proof of our wrong doing.

I am not supposed to say any of this because now I am part of the Slut Wars. Why yes, I will now reclaim the word *Puta* and this angry puta Latina now tells you this: *I am not part of your feminism*. In fact, I have never been. Because if I am supposed to ignore racism in the name of your initiative, it means we are pretty much against each other. Even though racism has been historically used as an excuse to rape certain women. The very same action you are supposedly against. Free of charge, I have a new slogan for you then: *Racist rape for some, miniature slut walks for others!*

**Layer four of this week’s shit puff pastry**

OMG GUYS OMG THREE AFRICAN WOMEN WON THE NOBEL PRIZE! OMG A VICTORY FOR FEMINISM! Pretty much [my Twitter stream](http://twitter.com/#!/redlightvoices) was inundated with similarly celebratory expressions. RAH RAH CHEERS! Picture me, at this point, giving intense side eye to my computer screen. A victory for feminism, you say? How is that? Which feminism? The feminism of the three previous layers of the shit puff pastry I just described? You are now celebrating the Nobel Prize of three African women as yours when, a significant and visible portion of your movement did not stand for the countless other African American women who are being called names RIGHT NOW, ONE CLICK AWAY ALSO IN THE NAME OF YOUR MOVEMENT? But suddenly THESE three African women are a victory for feminism?! Sorry, but what?! I am missing something here. Oh right. Yes. I am missing my “*connect the dots*” game, which cannot separate all of these events from one another.

Moreover, and again, free of charge, I am going to provide further intersectional analysis for YOUR FEMINISM! These three African women won the Nobel Prize IN SPITE OF YOU. In spite of your actively working to oppress them and fuck up their lives. Because if you live in a Western Nation, in your name, your State has been making these women’s lives miserable. These women have achieved something enormous, of epic proportions, in spite of the fact that the State you are part of, the State that acts on your behalf and in your name, has been crushing them for decades, perhaps even centuries. But in celebrating their achievements as a victory for feminism, all of this is erased. We demand their inclusion in our movement!**SISTERHOOD! A ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR OUR SISTERS THAT WON THE NOBEL PRIZE!**

Except that no. Because your other sisters, the ones who make the more visible face of mainstream Western feminism today are allowing unspeakable acts of racism to happen under their watch. And you cannot celebrate these three specific African women without situating yourself in their realities and the realities of all WoC around you. Without asking yourself why your movement has been so often accused of alienating WoC, of not acknowledging the legacy of slavery and colonialism in rape culture, of not actively opposing violence against WoC and without examining the role that your State has had in the on going, persistent violence perpetrated on people from the Global South even today, as I type this. Unless your feminism is actively engaged in all of this multi dimensional analysis, YOU HAVE NO RIGHT CLAIMING THESE WOMEN AS YOUR OWN. Because in the Western city where you are reading this now, WoC, women who look very much like these Nobel Prize winners are subjected to racial violence on a daily basis. And if these three Nobel Prize winners are your sisters in feminism, I must ask you the obvious and difficult question: ***why are you not standing with your other, local WoC sisters while their bodies are violated; while their sons are sent to prison in the name of your safety; when they cannot find jobs because of institutionalized racism; when they are being deported; when their children are called “anchor babies”; when the State acting in your name sterilized them; when these women are being called N\*\*\*\*rs?!*** How can you morally justify selective solidarity with \*some\* WoC whose achievements are not unlike a Sisyphus burden while you are not actively working in the causes of the WoC who live around your corner? How can you not see that the two are tragically interconnected?

**Layer five of this week’s shit puff pastry**

I am hurting. Like real, physical pain on the right side of my torso. It’s been going on for a few days and I have no idea what’s causing it. I do know it’s gotten worse since I have been letting out all of this anger. I hurt even more so while I was researching [my last post about the corporate profits behind the business of undocumented immigrants](http://tigerbeatdown.com/2011/10/07/in-the-name-of-safety-the-multi-national-anti-immigration-industry-and-their-billionaire-profits/). Obviously this is not evident in the post itself but I spent days reading accounts of abuses perpetrated on immigrant bodies. [I also saw the trailer to this film](http://likeamanonearth.blogspot.com/) which [Eli recommended in one of the comments](http://tigerbeatdown.com/2011/10/07/in-the-name-of-safety-the-multi-national-anti-immigration-industry-and-their-billionaire-profits/#comment-44284). And I cried, when one of the Ethiopian women spoke of her abuse in the hands of smugglers and how she connected it with the European Union’s complicity. She had been raped in the name of my safety. Because I am a legal resident in a European country, I have to acknowledge that the State, on my behalf, deemed it acceptable that this body was abused. And I am also hurting because even though I put a lot of effort into that piece, nobody seemed to care much about it. **AND YOU FUCKING SHOULD.** Not because I wrote it, fuck that, no. But because all of that is done **IN YOUR NAME**. Because if you are a legal resident in a Western country, the State is actively abusing these people on your behalf. These immigrant, non White bodies are treated as worthless because YOU HAVE ALLOWED YOUR STATE TO DO THIS. And yet, few people seemed to connect to the piece or even find it worthy.

I do not give a damn that I wrote it. Moreover, I hereby give you permission to use my words as yours. Do not credit me if you do not feel like it. Use the words in that piece to discuss the subject. Tell people you wrote it if you need to. BUT IF YOU CALL YOURSELF A FEMINIST AND YOU DO NOT CARE THAT SOME WOMEN ARE GIVING BIRTH IN INHUMAN CONDITIONS AND THEIR CHILDREN ARE UNDER SUCH GRIEF THAT THEY HAVE SEWN THEIR LIPS TOGETHER THEN I AM NOT PART OF YOUR MOVEMENT. And if you cannot actively unpack your share of responsibility in these actions, which are happening right in your backyard, then one of us cannot call herself a feminist.

And if you cannot see how this issue is so deeply interconnected with all of the above, with racism, with violence on WoC, with rape culture, with colonialism, with our disdain for people from the Global South, with whose bodies are deemed human and whose are not (and as such, unrapeable), with institutionalized violence, with wars waged by our Nations on the countries where these people come from… if you cannot see all of this as part of the same landscape, as part of the same gigantic, oppressive shit puff pastry, then maybe I should not call myself a feminist. Maybe, indeed, throwing flames in the direction of feminism is all I have left.

I am not going to do that just yet. But **FEMINISM, I MUST WARN YOU: MY FLAME THROWER IS LOADED AND YOU HAVE DISAPPOINTED ME. My cats would be delighted to pee on you.**

# White Feminists: It’s Time to Put Up Or Shut Up on Race

<http://radicallyqueer.wordpress.com/>

<http://radicallyqueer.wordpress.com/2011/12/02/white-feminists-its-time-to-put-up-or-shut-up-on-race/#more-1153>

<http://radicallyqueer.wordpress.com/2011/11/30/ask-me-about-my-queerness/>

Listen up, white feminists.

We have a problem.  I’m including myself because none of us are immune from this problem.  We all fuck up.  And you can say “fucking up is natural,” and that’s true, but it’s time for us to start identifying our fuck ups, and not just learning from them, but acknowledging the hurt they cause other people.

We need to acknowledge that we **cannot know what it’s like to be an oppressed racial minority**.  Cannot.  The end.  Period.  We don’t know because we’re queer, because we’re disabled, because we’re Jewish, because we were the nerdy kid in school.  These things may have hurt us severely, but we need to stop playing Oppression Olympics and acknowledge that when we’re talking about race we Do.  Not.  Know.  No more metaphors.

We need to accept that when a person of color tells us we’ve fucked up, the answer is not to get defensive.  When we get that instinct to say “geez, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it that way atall,” it’s time to stop right now.  It doesn’t matter how you meant it.  It really doesn’t.  Someone doesn’t have to have racism in their heart to do something racist.  And doing something racist doesn’t make you an evil person who can never do good again, should never be an activist, should run off and hide in a hole somewhere.  It means you did something hurtful, you made a big mistake, and you need to own that mistake.  You need to say “I’m sorry.”  Full stop.  I’m sorry.  And if the person who called you out is generous enough to take time to explain what you did wrong, you need to have a seat and listen.

I’ve fucked this up plenty of times in my own life.  I’ve used social justice as a shield, to show how liberal and progressive I am.  I couldn’t possibly be a racist, right?

It doesn’t matter.  It really doesn’t matter, because all of us who couldn’t possibly be racist are doing racist things, and we need to cut it out.

We need to acknowledge that being a POC is not the only identity someone has.  POC disagree with each other, and there’s not always one big Anti-Racist Answer.  Maybe that’s hard to sort through.  Well, life is hard.  It’s not our job, as white people, to show up with “the answer.”  Again, have a seat.

We need to acknowledge that a WOC balances the identities of “woman” and “of color,” along with many other identities.  It is **never okay** to tell someone to set aside race while we focus on gender or feminism for a while.  Gender is informed by race.  Feminism had better fucking include anti-racism or this ship is sunk, let’s all go home.  By the way, this isn’t always blatant and obvious.  It happens when a POC raises what seems like a minor point in the language of a document, and a white leader in the group says you know, we’re really voting on the main resolution right now.  It happens when a group of mostly white feminists suggests that one of their POC members be in charge of “dealing” with a race issue.  Don’t tolerate this bullshit.

We need to acknowledge that any movement must address the needs of its most marginalized members, or any cries of elitism are absolutely true.  We need to go beyond token efforts to include POC, working class people, disabled people, immigrants, and others in our feminist movements, and when we bring marginalized voices to the table, we need to listen.  We need to accept that maybe the thing we’ve been fighting for our whole lives isn’t as important as another thing that is hurting someone else.  We need to pay attention to books written by marginalized people that aren’t part of the “canon,” and listen to their priorities.  We need to focus on prison reform, on violence against transgender sex workers of color, on what’s happening in immigration detention facilities, on the continued genocide against indigenous people in the US and all over the world.

I believe that feminism is viable, and will kick some serious ass if we stop being idiots about race and other issues.  I’m launching [QueerFeminism.com](http://www.queerfeminism.com/) at the start of 2012 to focus on how to rescue this movement and redefine feminism as “radical opposition to patriarchy,” a definition that explicitly incorporates the horrors of racism and colonization.  I hope some of you will join me in that effort.

In the meantime, if you do nothing else today, white feminists, read this article by Flavia Dzodan: [My Feminism Will Be Intersectional or It Will Be Bullshit](http://tigerbeatdown.com/2011/10/10/my-feminism-will-be-intersectional-or-it-will-be-bullshit/).